

Ethiopia Stretches Forth Across the Atlantic: African American Anticolonialism during the Interwar Period

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It did not take long to realize that it had not been the War to End All Wars.¹ In heralding the end of formal European imperialism, however, World War I was nonetheless world-altering, though this would take longer to discern. W.E.B. Du Bois, as usual, was ahead of the intellectual curve in grasping the War's significance. As one who had argued since the beginning of the century that white supremacy was a transnational rather than a US phenomenon, Dr. Du Bois was well placed to point out that the war was rooted in empire-building in Africa, and that the contributions of black troops during the conflict made a return to the status quo ante impossible.² Du Bois' arguments were but one expression of how the War and its aftermath meant days of hope and trepidation for African Americans. The leaders of Russia's newly proclaimed workers' state spoke in an admittedly foreign ideological idiom, but they nonetheless communicated a seeming willingness to fight for the rights of people of colour and against imperialism the world over. At the Versailles negotiations, Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points—his own white supremacist beliefs and policies notwithstanding—gave the concept of “self-determination” for all peoples new international respectability. Du Bois was also in Paris in 1919, where he reinvigorated the Pan-African Congress tradition by convening the first Pan-African Congress since Henry Sylvester Williams' gathering of 1900. Taken together, these events had amplified the worldliness of the black freedom struggle in the United States, thereby raising the stakes regarding African American participation in global anticolonialism.

In the United States, it was a time of Red Summers and Red Scares, but also one of renewed defiance. Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association had become the largest mass movement in African American history, fueled by the recent black migration that created an exodus from the rural South. African Americans defended themselves with a new militancy against the white terrorism that characterized race relations across the country. This combination of circumstances provided the backdrop to a black refusal to endure the violence of white supremacy without an active response, a refusal to which poet Claude McKay gave voice in 1919. The last stanza of his popular “If We Must Die” read:

Oh Kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!³

McKay gave notice that "fighting back" was to be the catchphrase of black resistance in the post-war period, and given the tumult of recent global events, it was unlikely that the struggle for equality and justice would be contained within a domestic framework.

Yet it was not until the Depression that these radical sentiments were fully mobilized in a wave of opposition that would confront racial capitalism in the global arena. Previous to the rupturing force of World War One, published African American thought about Africa often fell within the framework of uplift and civilizing missions.⁴ By the 1930s, a number of social phenomena created the conditions for an unprecedented response when Mussolini's forces invaded Ethiopia; these included black urbanization, a significant African American academic presence, comparatively inclusive New Deal legislation, the crisis of capitalism, and a lively black press. The relative prominence of the Communist Party of the United States and the ascendancy of Mussolini and Hitler in Europe also led to the development of an antifascism in which black and white leftists could make common cause. In the context of these developments the black reform elite, with its relatively restrained approach to racial progress, was criticized with renewed vigour in print by an increasingly leftist black intelligentsia, and in demonstrations by the black working-class and white left through public calls for an active response to Ethiopia's subjugation.⁵

The defence of Ethiopia marks a crucial chapter of African American and world history, in which black critiques of political economy and international relations became intertwined during the crucial interwar-era struggle against white supremacy. Moreover, this episode underscores the contributions that African Americans and some leftist whites made to both anticolonial struggles and to the rise of what later came to be known as the Third World.⁶ This brew of anticolonial internationalism, antiracism, and a critical approach to capitalism presented a significant challenge to US economic and racial liberalism that would continue into the Cold War.

To show how some of the groundwork had already been laid for the 1935 response among African Americans, in this essay I take up the symbolic significance of Ethiopia, the mass appeal of the UNIA, and the perennial intellectual force of Pan-Africanism. From here, I will emphasize the extent to which the mobilization against Mussolini's aggression was a plebian phenomenon imbued with antiracist and politically leftist ideological content, a point to which the most

detailed treatments of these events have paid limited attention.⁷ In keeping with historian Glenda Gilmore's argument that the radical left before 1950 "redefined the debate over white supremacy and hastened its end," I want to add to our understanding of African American reactions to the Italo-Ethiopian conflict by documenting how they were constitutive of an interwar confluence of opposition to racial oppression, economic exploitation, and empire.⁸ Like Du Bois' own leftward drift between producing his wartime analyses and publishing *Black Reconstruction* in the year of Italy's invasion, many African Americans forged their extant internationalist racial pride during this decade and a half into a potent, popular critique of white supremacy and its imbrication with global capitalism.⁹ Symbolic Ethiopia, Pan-Africanism, and the UNIA provided elements of this critique; the relatively open class war of the Depression enabled its mobilization.

Ethiopia: A Transatlantic Symbol

Ethiopia did not suddenly come to symbolize Africa when Mussolini's military forces began their invasion, nor was African American interest in the country new in 1935. In the ancient Mediterranean world, Homer and Herodotus both at times used "Ethiopia," or "aithiops" to refer to lands inhabited by people whose skin was darker than that of most Greeks and Romans.¹⁰ While European interest in "Ethiopia" may have been part of that increasingly rigid separation between Orient and Occident that for Edward Said "seems bold by the time of the *Iliad*," the entangled trajectories of peoples and their cultures that characterized the Atlantic world gave Ethiopia perennial significance through both European and African traditions.¹¹ When, for example, Vasco Nunez de Balboa allegedly encountered a "tribe of Ethiopians" in Panama in 1513, he was unclear as to whether this was a group of escaped slaves from Haiti. It was equally unclear from which region of Africa they originated.¹² But Balboa's terminology indicates that Ethiopia served as a geographic metonym for Africa from the earliest days of American-European-African contact.

For Africans in the Americas, Ethiopia continued to act as a symbol for Africa as a whole since the Christian Bible became a definitive influence on the enslaved peoples and their descendants.¹³ In Jamaica, where the name Ethiopia became identified with salvation, an ex-slave founded the Ethiopian Baptist Church in 1784, the island's first Baptist church.¹⁴ In the United States, the biblical verse Psalms 68:31, "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God" became a scriptural basis for a prophetic interpretation of Ethiopia's role in history. From Robert Alexander Young and David Walker in the Jacksonian period, to Henry Highland Garnet, Martin R. Delany, Edward Blyden, and Alexander Crummell in subsequent decades, influential black thinkers accorded Ethiopia great significance throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁵ By 1900, such awareness had spread well beyond the black intelligentsia to become

part of African American folk thought and popular history, and extant pro-Ethiopian sensibilities were heightened in 1896 when Italy suffered a decisive military defeat by Ethiopians under Menelik II at the battle of Adwa.¹⁶ This popular interest in Ethiopia continued into the 1920s and 1930s, and ensured that when Italian fascists physically threatened Ethiopia's sovereignty, a good number of African Americans considered their own homeland to be under attack.¹⁷

During the interwar period, Ethiopia's emblematic stature established it as part of the African American imagined community's cultural and historic memory. This historic memory jogged other streams of black internationalism in 1935, from the "Resistance at home, resistance abroad" slogan promulgated by the nascent black press in its abolitionist campaigns during the Civil War, to international solidarity campaigns and a general tendency among black intellectuals to perceive and write about domestic phenomena from a global perspective.¹⁸ These instances of black internationalism represented African American interest in the global scene and white supremacy's role in structuring it. Pan-Africanist, nationalist, and later antifascist influences also activated this memory of Ethiopia's significance into defensive action when Italy invaded in 1935.

On the interwar cultural front, Ethiopia was celebrated through a renewed spirit of antiracist militancy and international solidarity. A variety of black artists in 1920s Harlem utilized artistic media to supplant white society's derogatory stereotypes of African and African American cultures. The arts took on strategic importance since whites had effectively blocked the doors to African American economic and electoral participation in American society.¹⁹ Traveling musical ensembles, such as the Salem Tutt Whitney and J. Homer Tutt Company, who in 1920 presented a show advertising its tracing "the origination of Jazz back to the ancient Ethiopians," further demonstrating the reach of interest in Ethiopia as well as the political content of cultural production.²⁰

Interwar black culture's engagement with politics and the economy becomes clearer when we recall that the New Negro movement was an intrinsic component of migration from the South. Approximately two million African Americans left the South between 1900 and 1930.²¹ These migrants sought new opportunities bringing, in Alain Locke's phrasing, "a new vision of opportunity, of social and economic freedom, of a spirit to seize, even in the face of an extortionate and heavy toll, a chance for the improvement of conditions."²² Toni Morrison's unforgettable image of *Jazz*'s characters Joe and Violet Trace dancing their way into "the City" aboard a train captured Locke's notion of seizing "a chance for the improvement of conditions," because the decision to move was not only a push from the South but also a pull to a place where racism and poverty could be openly opposed and perhaps ultimately overcome.²³

The cultural production of what became known as the Harlem Renaissance was a part of this bold willingness to seize opportunities, however limited, available in the US after 1918. The cultural bloom of the 1920s and 1930s

did not overturn the structures of oppression that surrounded it, but these decades were a time when new sites of resistance and spaces of relative freedom were carved out. Since Ethiopia constituted such a pervasive symbol, it makes sense to think of African American reactions to war in that land as one important instance of what literary scholar Huston Baker has called the “profoundly beneficial effects for areas of Afro-American discourse” in the Harlem Renaissance era.²⁴ In the interwar whirlwind of cultural activity, political expectations, and global realities, the Pan-African movement, the UNIA, and the CPUSA attempted to address the concerns of the black community and participate in its mobilization against domestic and transnational oppression.

The Pan-African Congresses and the UNIA

In the shadow of the great power deliberations at Versailles, fifty-seven influential black delegates met in 1919 at the Grand Hotel in Paris for the convening of the first Pan-African Congress. The second Congress was held in London in August of 1921, with sessions in Brussels and Paris, and was followed by a third Congress in Lisbon in 1923 and a fourth in New York in 1927.²⁵ These gatherings, with their attendant speeches and resolutions, achieved little in tangible terms. They were nevertheless a significant component of black internationalism in the years before Italy invaded Ethiopia: the fact that the meetings took place at all was an accomplishment. That the Congresses brought together figures of the African diaspora whose intellectual leadership would keep the international context on the agenda of the black freedom struggle is a difficult achievement to measure, but one that undoubtedly played a crucial role during the Italo-Ethiopian crisis. One prescient resolution from the 1927 Congress, for example, demanded the continued independence of Ethiopia.²⁶ The Pan-Africanism of the Congresses shared many of the same concerns of the more populist UNIA; each demanded equality for African Americans as part of an overall movement that sought justice for all the peoples of Africa and the diaspora.

Yet the elite character of the Congresses placed distance between their high-minded resolutions and the aspirations of the black majority.²⁷ During the 1920s, they preferred to express their diasporic solidarity through the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Marcus Garvey rose to the fore of black politics in the US during the aftermath of the East St. Louis massacre of 1917, the Red Summer of 1919's white mob attacks on twenty-six black communities, and the resulting growth of black resistance. African Americans enthusiastically responded to Garvey's call for a mass mobilization of the peoples of Africa and the diaspora. His appeals to the black working class, his schemes to promote black wealth, his flair for pageantry and compelling rhetoric, his plans for repatriation, and his strong repudiation of the tenets of white supremacy brought Garvey respect and expanded the UNIA to as many as four million members worldwide.²⁸

The fact that the politics of the Garvey's organisation was more populist than that of the Pan-African Congresses did not by any measure mean that the UNIA was socialist in orientation. Indeed, as Colin Grant points out in his textured biography of Garvey, it was rather ironic that the Bureau of Investigation—who, thanks to the efforts of the young J. Edgar Hoover, saw Reds everywhere in the aftermath of World War I—attempted to pin Bolshevik labels on an individual so entrepreneurial in orientation.²⁹ Black nationalism was not socialism, but as we will see, both would later intersect in unexpected ways.

The UNIA reached its zenith in the early 1920s, after which internal and external problems brought about the rapid decline of the movement and the downfall of Garvey himself.³⁰ But many former UNIA members would still have been alive just over a decade later, and the racial pride that flourished at the height of this organization was sustained for generations. Garvey's emphasis on Africa, and particularly Ethiopia, laid the groundwork for the mobilization against Italy's invasion. As historian Alberto Sbacchi notes, "Ethiopia filled the vacuum left by the eclipsed Garvey movement."³¹ Ethiopia, though, had to share the stage in capturing and maintaining the attention of African Americans in the years following Garvey's 1927 deportation with one of the rising organizations of the period: the Communist Party of the United States.

Despite the apparent incongruity between the Marxism of the CPUSA and the black nationalism of the UNIA, there were important similarities between these outfits. Black nationalist ideas had enjoyed currency within US Party circles almost since its inception, as exemplified by Audley Moore, who became a Party leader during the 1930s while remaining a dues-paying member of the UNIA.³² Like one of its other main competitors, the NAACP, the CPUSA functioned as an unpredictable social movement as often as it did a highly disciplined institution, meaning that coalitions, factions, and individuals often formulated theory and praxis in ways that the leadership could not directly control.³³

Though the UNIA was undeniably dedicated to racial issues, it was also a movement that touched on class relations, since black populations throughout the Atlantic world were almost always of the working class. UNIA ideology, especially after the 1910s, could be quite conservative in terms of gender roles and economic programs, but even its entrepreneurialism was largely abandoned by what remained of the organization after the 1920s to compete with the Communists for African American working class allegiance.³⁴ The Depression gave rise to new vocabularies of economic critique that made possible the specifically leftist orientation of the movement in the 1930s that was not yet emergent during Garvey's heyday.

"The Kind of Vast Support that Ethiopia Enjoyed Amongst Blacks Everywhere"

In the 1930s, when Italian statesmen began to follow public rumblings about

Ethiopia with specific pronouncements of its designs on the African nation, member states of the League of Nations were unwilling to act, even when threats and provocations proceeded to outright invasion in October of 1935.³⁵ Italian designs on Ethiopia were longstanding; the prestige of colonial possessions and military revenge for Italian humiliation at Adwa in 1896 fit nicely into Mussolini's visions of fascist grandeur and a new Roman Empire. The British, French, and US governments, like that of Italy, were motivated by imperial concerns rather than by international law. The British and French governments were also particularly worried about alienating Italy in ways that might strengthen Mussolini's relations with Hitler's Germany. As George Padmore put it, "[t]he drama which opened in Berlin ended in Addis Ababa," and the Italian military dispensed aerial bombardments and poison gas on the Ethiopian people unimpeded by external diplomatic constraints.³⁶

For those who did not assume the logic of imperialism, Italy's claims were unconvincing. But since no sincere attempts to halt Mussolini were forthcoming from powerful states, counteraction against Italian fascism worked from the bottom up. The CPUSA took an interest in these developments. During the Depression, the CPUSA had established itself as a significant ally in the struggle against white supremacy, imperialism, and capitalist exploitation. The Party also benefitted from the great extent to which the mobilization in defense of Ethiopia was a popular phenomenon that already shared an affinity with the CPUSA's antifascist tactics and ideology.³⁷

As the Italian government's invasion plans became increasingly evident, so did the anticolonial opposition throughout the Atlantic world; these activities comprised a transcontinental context for events within the United States. In South Africa, protesters in Durban burned Mussolini in effigy while others rallied in Cape Town.³⁸ Walter Kumalo, an important Zulu chief who had served in France during World War I, tried to establish a military force to aid Ethiopia. Approximately 6,000 Africans petitioned the South African authorities for permission to enlist in Ethiopia's army. These requests were denied because British subjects were forbidden to serve in armies warring against nations with which Britain was at peace.³⁹ In West Africa, the Nigerian Youth Movement built on existing anti-imperialist sentiment to link calls for Ethiopia's defence to demands for self-government from British rule.⁴⁰

There were also protest activities in the Caribbean. These activities were reported in the black press, and monitored by the British Foreign Office, whose agents reported on mass meetings and circulating petitions in places like St. Lucia and Jamaica.⁴¹ Not only did 1935 witness the Caribbean's black population coming to Ethiopia's defense. That year also saw the beginning of a massive strike wave, itself in part the product of existing pro-Ethiopia mobilizations, which spread across the islands and the African continent. These developments forced the labour question onto the British and French imperial agendas, ultimately paving the road to decolonization.⁴²

In the British imperial metropole, parallel pro-Ethiopia mobilizations were underway. Exiled in London, Marcus Garvey took up a spirited campaign against the invasion through his journal, *The Blackman*.⁴³ In 1935, the International African Friends of Ethiopia was formed in London to consider sending a volunteer force to repel the invasion. The IAFE's executive committee included George Padmore, with Jomo Kenyatta serving as secretary, Amy Ashwood Garvey as treasurer, and C.L.R. James as chairperson.⁴⁴ Ras Makonnen, originally of British Guiana, joined the group after being deported from Denmark for his antifascist agitation there. Makonnen's description of his experience with the IAFE provides an insightful example of the popular nature of the responses to the crisis:

It's very important to put the response of the black world to the Ethiopian War into perspective, especially since it is easy to get the impression that pan-Africanism was just some type of petty protest activity – a few blacks occasionally meeting in conference and sending resolutions here and there. But the real dimensions can only be gathered by estimating the kind of vast support that Ethiopia enjoyed amongst blacks everywhere. We were only one center, the International African Friends of Ethiopia, but that title was very accurate. Letters simply poured into our office from blacks on three continents asking where could they register. "I've got money." Letters simply poured into our office from blacks on three continents asking where could they register. I've got money. I can pay my fare across to Ethiopia and I'll buy my own rifle even. Indeed, if researchers would care to consult the columns of a paper like the *Chicago Defender* of that year they would find countless letters from ordinary blacks all over North America.⁴⁵

Indeed, Makonnen's portrayal of London also encapsulated the mood in the African American press coverage of the crisis.⁴⁶

In the aftermath of Reconstruction's broken promise and Woodrow Wilson's narrow understanding of what making "the world safe for democracy" entailed, black newspaper readerships expected greater militancy from the publications that they supported.⁴⁷ Early in the century, African American newspapers were more likely to reflect Booker T. Washington's politics than those of W.E.B. Du Bois, but by the Depression, the black press entered its "golden age," during which the economic crisis inspired renewed critical commentary on the events of the day. And as nationally circulated weeklies, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *New York Amsterdam News*, and the *Chicago Defender* represented the most cosmopolitan politics in black America.⁴⁸

In 1935, as during the entire interwar period, African Americans looked to the black press for information since papers produced across the colour line often reflected the perspectives of capital and white society. By the 1930s, when, as Cedric Robinson claims, "the rise of Italian Fascism occasioned a militant opposition among the Black American masses," coverage of the Ethiopian situa-

tion in the papers of the black press and the white left occurred in an environment of extensive antifascist activism throughout the country.⁴⁹ In response to the call to defend Ethiopia, groups such as the academic Ethiopia Research Council, the Popular Front's Provisional Committee for the Defense of Ethiopia, and the nationalist African Patriotic League and Pan-African Reconstruction Association were formed, as were numerous other US-based organizations.⁵⁰ In addition to associations based in African American communities, some sectors within organized labour loudly criticized the Italian government's actions. At a labour conference organized by socialists Frank Crosswaith and A. Philip Randolph, International Ladies Garment Workers Union Vice President Luigi Antonini denounced fascist aggression against Ethiopia to sustained applause. Others took direct action, such as refusing to load ships that could supply the Italian forces, thereby giving substance to labour's antifascist sloganeering.⁵¹

Antifascist and anticolonial activism also took place on many college campuses.⁵² Howard University in Washington, DC, was one centre of activity for engaged students and faculty. Black intellectuals maintained campus interest in Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular during the 1930s through the Ethiopian Research Council and through related activities.⁵³ Within days of the invasion, Robert F.S. Harris, who led a Committee for Ethiopia with Atlanta University's Rayford W. Logan and the Abyssinian Baptist Church's Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., authorized Ralph Bunche, then a political scientist at Howard, to open a branch of the Committee in Washington, D.C. Washington's African American community beyond Howard was also interested in opposing Mussolini. Sensing the mood of his congregation, Frederick Brown Harris, minister of Foundry Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington, offered Bunche "my name and any influence I may have in mobilizing public opinion against Italy and for Ethiopia." Bunche was also part of the group who received Ethiopian diplomat Lij Tasfaye Zaphiro during his visit to Howard in 1936.⁵⁴

In New York, the Universal Ethiopian Students Association, an organization of high school seniors, college, and graduate students, was active throughout the 1930s. Inspired by Garvey's UNIA, they corresponded with some of the central figures working on the Ethiopian issue. They also organized public community events such as evening summer courses in African history, a mock trial entitled "Africa vs. the Imperialist Powers," and a "momentous debate" over the assertion that "Western civilization is detrimental to the black man's progress."⁵⁵ Student demonstrations occurred in many parts of the United States during the crisis. On 8 November, campus rallies involving white supporters of Ethiopia took place at Columbia University in New York, Brooklyn College, New York University, the YMCA in Richmond, Virginia, Randolph-Macon Women's College in Lynchburg, Virginia, Penn State College in Pennsylvania, Howard University, the University of Chicago, and at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.⁵⁶

As Ras Makonnen indicated, letters to the editor are also an excellent

source of black opinion regarding the conflict. By no means did the *Defender* hold a monopoly on concerned subscribers. In his 9 May "Day by Day" in the *Baltimore Afro-American*, William N. Jones remarked that "Most impressive of all communications coming to this column this week are letters from young men and women throughout the country offering cooperation in any plan in which they can help in the Abyssinian situation." Widespread youth interest in the crisis indicates that New Negro militancy of the post-World War I years continued to appeal to younger African Americans in the Depression. On the same page, the "Afro Readers Say" section printed letters entitled "Ready to Go," "Ready to Fight," and "We Await Word from Abyssinia." The phrasing of one letter from Detroit clearly demonstrated the enduring legacy of the UNIA: "We have been told of what is happening in Abyssinia. We heard of this 15 years ago, but we didn't believe it. Marcus Garvey told us of the very same thing now happening. There are millions of us, and if we can get there, we are willing to fight for Abyssinia. It is our country. We should have one God, one aim, one destiny."⁵⁷

On 23 March, the *Afro-American* printed "Count Him In" from Brooklyn, "Would Die for Abyssinia" from Lancaster, PA, "How Ethiopia Must Win" from Philadelphia, "Six War Vets Ready" from Hampton, VA, "Wants to Help Ethiopia" from Cleveland, and "What Will the League of Nations Do About Abyssinia's Protection?" from Baltimore. Washingtonian Mrs. J. Davis's comment in the 12 October copy that "If money will win and preserve the independence of Africa, I am willing to do my part in the way of making a contribution," and Philadelphian Edward Jones's exhortation in the 28 September edition: "Long live our fatherland, Ethiopia! God save and aid the King of Kings!" were typical.⁵⁸ Although it is difficult to determine the extent to which these were the views of individuals as opposed to those who might have been putting forward perspectives from particular organizations, these letters certainly illustrated a broad compass of concern. Such expressions continued throughout the year, finally dissipating in 1936 when it became apparent that the Italian offensive was irreversible.

This overwhelming concern over Ethiopia's independence indicates the internationality of African American racial pride, which, taken together with the intense attention fixed on the Joe Louis-Primo Carnera boxing match of 26 June, gave credence to black nationalism and leftist antifascism. Louis handily defeated "Mussolini's Darling" at their Yankee Stadium engagement, which translated into a symbolic defeat of Italian imperialism. This victory also propelled Louis as a black celebrity who would come to embody the hopes of democracy against fascism for many in the United States as Mussolini and especially Hitler sought to forcefully expand their spheres of influence.⁵⁹

Although the major publications of the African American press had varying editorial positions on the issues of the day, they were uniform in their continued sympathetic coverage of the Ethiopian story. This convergence of reporting regarding the crisis was undoubtedly driven by the readership, especially in a

period when subscriptions were more important than advertising revenue. In the more conservative *New York Amsterdam News*, the readership similarly expressed its support for Ethiopia. Letters such as "Italy and Ethiopia" on 2 March, "Would Fight for Africa" on 16 March, and "Recruits Get Ready to Serve in Ethiopia" (a call for volunteers from Walter J. Davis, a Fort Worth, TX, veteran) on 20 July revealed not only readership disquiet but also a determination to actively thwart Mussolini's plans if possible.

Predictably, the *Chicago Defender's* subscriber correspondence exhibited a similar tone, and the *Pittsburgh Courier* also received a deluge of mail on the subject. In the 27 July "What the People Think" section of the *Courier*, for example, thirty letters about Ethiopia crowded the page. This outpouring of readership sentiment was reflected in, and helps explain, the extent of the coverage on Ethiopia in all of these papers.

Ethiopia was the story of the year in the black press in 1935. Articles from early in the crisis emphasized the view that Ethiopia had defeated Italy before, and therefore ought not to be written off as a military lightweight. A 16 February *Defender* piece on Ethiopia's unwillingness to submit to Italian threats represented an editorial angle which became more common as war neared and finally arrived.⁶⁰ These papers were persistent in their attempts to establish that Ethiopia, contrary to stereotypes perpetuated about all of Africa in the white media, was a "modern" rather than a "backward" nation.⁶¹ This sentiment was epitomized by a 23 November photograph of Haile Selassie in the *Baltimore Afro-American* accompanied by the caption "Nothing If Not Modern." The *Chicago Defender* told readers that Mussolini ought to "watch his step" if he was seriously considering an invasion, and that Ethiopia's artillery was prepared to repel Italian aggression, while the *Pittsburgh Courier* reported on the "flood of modern arms and ammunition pouring into Haile Selassie's kingdom."⁶²

In a related theme, the black press maintained a positive appraisal of Ethiopia's military performance for as long as possible in the face of Italy's ultimately superior forces. *New York Amsterdam News* readers were informed that Ethiopia was able to "thrash" its foes on the battlefield, the *Afro-American* carried a headline reading "3,500 Italians Fall as Ethiopians Halt Advances," and *Courier* subscribers learned of a startling 14,000 Italian casualty figure within weeks of the invasion.⁶³ Undeniably, inflated journalistic diction often obscured the realities of Ethiopia's slim chances of victory.⁶⁴ When Ethiopian defeat became manifest, however, these papers shifted focus increasingly to fascist brutality.⁶⁵

Apart from reporting on the conflict itself, the black press also highlighted support for Ethiopia from within the United States. Although the US government prohibited military assistance to Ethiopia, and the pecuniary realities of the Depression severely curtailed financial contributions, opponents of the invasion found venues in which to express their politics beyond the editorial page.⁶⁶ Church congregations and their leaders lent their support to the cause.⁶⁷ American Aid for

Ethiopia—a mostly white group led by prominent religious figures and philanthropists—raised an ambulance and a ton of medical supplies.⁶⁸ Mass meetings, public talks, and demonstrations—often organized by the Communist Party—were reported in Boston, Birmingham, Pittsburgh, Mobile, Detroit, Los Angeles, Baltimore, Cincinnati, New Brunswick, Buffalo, St. Louis, Passaic, Omaha, Seattle, New Orleans, and Indianapolis.⁶⁹ Two women chained themselves to a lamppost at the Italian consulate.⁷⁰ Protesters splattered an Italian Vice Consul with ink.⁷¹

New York and Chicago were the natural nuclei of opposition to Italian fascism. As the two major terminus cities of African American migration from the South, these urban centers had witnessed militant antiracism during the UNIA's zenith; that spirit lived on in the public expressions of rage at Mussolini's imperialism. In Chicago, various actions were organized, the most dramatic of which was the 1 September march in which 750 police attacked the crowd and arrested 300 demonstrators, with Communists Harry Haywood and Thomas McKenna prominent among them.⁷² In New York, fundraising events, well-attended lectures, and mass rallies involving black and white participants took place throughout the crisis period.⁷³ Sometimes the scale of these proceedings even caught the attention of the *New York Times*, which was generally unsympathetic to the left or the needs and aspirations of the black community.⁷⁴

“Turn Your Guns Against the Fascist Leaders, Assassins and Robbers”

Ras Makonnen's depiction of London could easily be transferred to the United States. Where, then, did the CPUSA stand amid this widespread configuration of pro-Ethiopian interest? Despite its undemocratic internal structure and political culture, the Party was not marginal to the popular pro-Ethiopia effort.⁷⁵ Just as the UNIA appealed to working-class African Americans because its community presence differentiated it from the reformist impulses of traditional black leadership groups, the CP enjoyed a measure of popularity in the 1930s because of its confrontational posture and its willingness to take up significant “local” issues such as tenant advocacy in New York, sharecropper organizing in Alabama, and the Scottsboro and Angelo Herndon cases.⁷⁶ These efforts exemplified Communist concentration on African American cadre building, a task necessary to fostering meaningful proletarian unity, but also one that would require, in the words of one internal document, that “we must wipe out every shred of fascist white chauvinism from the ranks of the Party.”⁷⁷ The point worth emphasizing here is not that the diverse black community adopted the CPUSA's given line at a particular moment. Rather, the Party was one important institutional location through which, in Nikhil Singh's words, black activists proved “remarkably flexible and nondoctrinaire in choosing the vehicles and instruments of their radicalism.”⁷⁸ Furthermore, to think about the relationship between the CPUSA and the black community as a unidirectional one in which the former exerted its influence on the

latter is a misreading on two counts: it occludes the overlap of people and ideas between black and red constituencies, and it obscures how much Communists were influenced by African American proximity to and participation in Party activities.

Although international analyses were not new to the black community in the 1930s, African Americans and their allies both within and outside the Party were elaborating the class content of their anticolonial critique after the Italian invasion. As Penny Von Eschen explains, "At the heart of anticolonialists' core set of beliefs was a conception of democracy that embraced the struggles of colonial peoples and saw black peoples as part of the laboring classes of the world."⁷⁹ Similarly, literary responses to the conflict by black writers such as Langston Hughes and Melvin Tolson moved from racial pride toward class consciousness.⁸⁰ In Hughes' case, his class analysis would inform his coverage of the Spanish Civil War for the *Baltimore Afro-American* in 1937, thereby contributing to the proliferation of antifascist politics within the African American community while also reflecting the increasingly pro-socialist perspective of the black press in the late 1930s.⁸¹ In general, a political economy approach to global white supremacy was a significant legacy of the mobilization of 1935. The attraction that the explanatory power of leftist ideologies held for African Americans during the Depression in part accounts for the vigour with which liberals and conservatives would attempt to curtail these ideas after 1945.

In keeping with their increasing outspokenness about the links between international and domestic systems of inequality, African Americans grew increasingly critical of economic hierarchies "behind the veil" within the United States during the Popular Front period.⁸² This is not to suggest that race receded into the background as class occupied the main stage. Instead, African American racial consciousness was augmented by greater attention to domestic and international class dynamics during the crisis, thereby meshing their perspectives with those of rank-and-filers in the CPUSA. Such heightened class consciousness was in part the result of straightened circumstances brought about by the Depression, but the Communist Party played a role in making available a particular articulation of resulting grievances. Black acceptance of class-based ideas and, more importantly, appreciation for the Communists' willingness to combat white supremacy head on was not contingent upon Party membership. In Harlem, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. undoubtedly represented many in his congregation and community when he stated that regarding "the Negro," "[h]e appreciated the Communists for their unceasing efforts on his behalf. He will support common causes, join willingly in united fronts, fight side by side in every crusade, but he does not join the Party."⁸³ Overall, the CPUSA enjoyed some success in the black community because its outright contestation of the colour line resonated with the militancy of working-class, and some middle-class, African Americans.

Considering that antifascists incisively underscored the white supremacist links between imperialism in the global arena and the collective insult of segrega-

tion in the United States, it is hardly surprising that race constituted a fundamental lens through which black activists viewed the crisis. What is perhaps more striking is the extent to which a class analysis and indeed Communism itself was an element of black anticolonial discourse. CPUSA tactics of mass mobilization included African Americans in a type of bottom-up organizing that contrasted with anything that more established elements of the black community had to offer. And since the 1935 crisis arose in the aftermath of an elitist approach to US involvement in Liberia and Haiti that laid bare the NAACP's class specific politics, African Americans were ready to embrace the type of popular mobilization that the CPUSA embodied.⁸⁴

Building on the tradition of "uplifting the race," the black middle class often fought racism through available means under unfavourable circumstances. Although they at times considered adopting the kind of analysis promoted by the CP, the African American leadership class' emphasis on respectability ensured that the Party would continue to have a distinct, though never immense, appeal for the black working class.⁸⁵ Communist efforts in aid of Ethiopia did result in some recruitment among African Americans. Howard "Stretch" Johnson, an artist and intellectual who became a key cultural worker in Party circles, was introduced to the CPUSA through their work on the Ethiopian issue, which in turn led him to conclude that "the more Communists I met, the more I liked what they had to say and what they were doing. Because I saw that of all the people who were talking about solving problems and programs and so forth, when there was a picket line, they were out in front."⁸⁶ Johnson's account was not representative, but also not entirely exceptional.

Thus, African Americans were unwilling to join the party in large numbers, but the CPUSA did provide a style of leadership not available from traditional middle class leaders. The Party certainly squandered some of its support through Maxim Litvinov's silence at the League of Nations regarding Italy's aggression, by covert Soviet oil, coal, tar, and wheat sales to Italy, and by the NAACP's public exposure of both.⁸⁷ Just like the governments of Britain, France, and the United States, Soviet diplomacy was guided by "national interests" as the state defined them, which in Russia's case meant containing Germany's growing threat more than it meant opposing imperialism and maintaining a principled defense of a relatively powerless nation. The relationship between the CPUSA and the Comintern, however, was not always one in which the directives of the latter absolutely determined the membership's behaviour in the former. In reality, the NAACP's eagerness to expose Soviet duplicity at the League of Nations was not only a genuine attempt to show that Communist leaders did not always put black interests first, but was also as a strategic maneuver in the contest for black leadership, a contest in which the CP was a legitimate contender.

The opposition to Italy's imperialist enterprise regularly featured in the Communist Party's *Daily Worker*, with coverage of the urgent situation brewing

overseas and the reaction in the United States beginning early in the year.⁸⁸ The paper also encouraged its majority white readership to see Ethiopia's struggle, and that of their fellow black citizens, as a central element of their own confrontation with capitalist exploitation. A 4 April editorial urged readers: "Every worker, every friend of the colonial masses and the people of Ethiopia, every enemy of Fascism, will rally to the support of the defensive actions of the Ethiopian government."⁸⁹ The Communist Party of Italy, itself exiled in Paris during this period, was also developing an antifascism that opposed empire, as exemplified in one of its communications reprinted in the *Daily Worker*: "Keep away from Africa! Don't shoot your brothers, the Ethiopian people. Embrace the Ethiopians as your brothers. Turn your guns against the fascist leaders, assassins and robbers."⁹⁰ American readers, black and white, were to consider this message as applying directly to them also.

But did any of the Party's efforts have an impact on how African Americans perceived the conflict? If the black press is any indication, it seems that the CPUSA was moving into the black mainstream during this period. The *Baltimore Afro-American* was particularly friendly to the Party, and, like other papers, published stories that held the Soviet Union's lack of segregation up as a model worth emulating. Such stories often featured an African American celebrity's reception in Russia, or presented a photograph of racially integrated groups, but the editorial slant was generally positive, and such coverage continued after the NAACP's exposure of Soviet betrayal at the League. Indeed, evidence of growing CP legitimacy during the Italo-Ethiopian confrontation could be found in the Association's own publication, *The Crisis*. The monthly's May, 1935 edition accorded prominent coverage to CPUSA theorist James Allen's response to the question "Which Way Out for the Negro?," part of a forum on solutions to living conditions under the Jim Crow order. Allen offered a standard reiteration of the Party line on self-determination in the Black Belt, which prompted a letter from NAACP Field Secretary William Pickens, indicating that he found the piece "very interesting and enlightening," while its implications raised some doubts.⁹¹

The African American press carried stories about the Party that were not directly related to Ethiopian defense activities, indicating the extent to which the CPUSA, in part because of the Scottsboro case, but also because of other local initiatives, had become part of black mainstream discourse during the Depression.⁹² There were also articles emphasizing the racial dimension of the crisis and of reactions to it in the US, and by no means were all African Americans enamored with communism. Indeed, racial violence between African and Italian Americans did take place in 1935 specifically because of international events.⁹³ These incidents are not surprising, because historical investments in whiteness created such strong barriers to interracial solidarity, and because although there were numerous visible and vocal Italian antifascists, most Italian Americans supported the policies of their home country.⁹⁴

The debate about the CPUSA also took place in editorial columns and

letters to the editor. Views about communism were seriously discussed in the major papers of the black press, indicating that CPUSA ideology existed within a range of respectable, debatable ideas.⁹⁵ Again, the point here is not that African Americans rallied behind the Party in droves, but rather that Party perspectives were an important aspect of debates within the African American community as to what strategies best suited the freedom struggle in this moment.

The CPUSA was also an important part of community organizing. In the Chicago pro-Ethiopia march that precipitated violent police reaction, Harry Haywood was a key organizer. In his account of the events, Party members on alternating rooftops would address crowds as they disembarked from “EI” stations, and “every time we would outsmart the police, a great roar would go up from the crowd – and every time another arrest was made, they would jeer the cops.” It was because of acts like these, according to Haywood, that Communists “had become respected members – even leaders – in the Black community.”⁹⁶

The spirit of cooperation that Popular Front antifascism made more likely was evident in the Provisional Committee for the Defense of Ethiopia. The PCDE was one of the first organized responses to the crisis, and it claimed a membership of 15,000.⁹⁷ Although this number was probably inflated, the PCDE was a vital component of mobilization efforts; it arranged rallies, coordinated approximately thirty black health professionals into a medical committee, and sent Willis N. Huggins to Geneva in an attempt to urge the League of Nations to take stronger action against the Italian government.⁹⁸

The assorted elements of the PCDE had their mutual suspicions, but in the face of the overarching issue of Ethiopian defense, these suspicions were overcome to a surprising extent. Consider Abner Berry, a Communist and PCDE secretary, recounting his experiences when Party members approached nationalists to work together. When a UNIA leader was persuaded to attend an Italian Workers Club meeting, “[t]he Chairman called on him to make a speech. Well, he gave the regular speech that a nationalist would be expected to make, the whole business about Ethiopia, what it stood for, and when he got through, he looked at me indignantly and said, ‘Well, I told them.’ And then there was this burst of applause, they gave him money, and he never got through talking about it.”⁹⁹ The episode revealed that although socialism and nationalism should not be conflated as interchangeable forms of resistance, the two were not always and only divergent. Although antifascism provided the movement advocating for Ethiopia with a common political denominator, every participant was not necessarily a self-identified leftist. But each of these political actors helped create a camp aligned around a political cause, within which leftist thinkers held considerable sway in articulating the relationship between opposition to racism, fascism, capital, and empire. These ideas had an effect, especially as they were being put forward by those who had shown themselves to be committed supporters of Ethiopia’s cause.

The PCDE brought together a very disparate cluster of organizations

and represented the potential of Popular Front cooperation. As the PCDE posters of 1935 indicate, their “monster” meetings drew crowds to such venues as the Abyssinian Baptist Church and even Madison Square Garden. At these events, liberals such as Walter White and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., nationalists A.L. King and Arthur Reid, the CPUSA’s Abner Berry and James Ford, and the unclassifiable Du Bois shared the stage.¹⁰⁰ Within a decade, an attempt to assemble such a diverse group might have appeared naïve or quixotic, but in the early days of the Popular Front, when the threat of fascism meant that choosing between liberalism, nationalism, and communism did not entail a fixed and final decision, possibilities were less predictable.

The Communist Party at times played an off-stage role in the larger black community, but it nevertheless remained influential. This was not only or even primarily because the Party’s class struggle ideology spoke to the class divisions in black life. Rather, the CPUSA won supporters because of rank-and-file sincerity in the struggle against racism and poverty. For the Party, the Italo-Ethiopian crisis occurred at a moment when it was reaching out to those with varying ideological proclivities to fight the threat posed by fascism. This confluence of factors placed the Party close to the center of the mass mobilization that occurred in that year. The CPUSA, occupying the political field in tension and coalition with the NAACP, nationalist groups, and liberal humanitarians, was not the only group that gave structured direction to the movement, but it was one to which African Americans of the period gave serious consideration for the purposes of Ethiopia’s defense. In the final analysis, a leftist mentalité was an integral part of that coming together of Communist, Pan-Africanist, and nationalist elements that made 1935 such a pivotal year in United States, and indeed global, history.

1935 represents a crossroads in the African American freedom struggle. It was a moment that built upon an internationalist tradition that linked oppression at home with exploitation overseas. It built on these traditions, but it gave public expression to their sentiments like never before. 1935 also foreshadowed the struggles to come during World War Two, the Civil Rights Movement, and the colonized’s quest for independence. Italy’s aggression had a new fascist twist to it, but there was something very familiar about its themes of white supremacy and economic exploitation. Although African Americans had decried imperialism before, Italy chose to attack not only one of the last remaining independent African nations, but also one whose symbolic import was immeasurable. The scale of the African American response to Mussolini’s colonialist project was in keeping with the significance of what Ethiopia stood for.

NOTES

- 1 For their comments, suggestions, critiques, and words of encouragement, I would like to thank Karen Ferguson, Mark Leier, Marilyn Gates, Nelson Lichtenstein,

Christopher Newfield, Cedric Robinson, George Lipsitz, Jane Power, Jack O'Dell and the readers for *Left History* for sharing their helpful responses to earlier versions of this article.

- 2 Beyond participating in the Pan-African Congress in London in 1900, Du Bois' writing is replete with references to the international dimensions of race and racism, including perhaps his most famous sentence: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea." *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover, 1994 [1903]), 9. See also "The Color Line Belts the World" (1906), "The African Roots of the War" (1915), and "The Negro's Fatherland" (1917), all reprinted in David Levering Lewis, ed. *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), 42-43, 642-651, 652-654. For an excellent recent study that employs the kinds of insights Du Bois put forward about the war, see John H. Morrow, Jr., *The Great War: An Imperial History* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
- 3 Claude McKay, *A Long Way From Home: An Autobiography* (London: Pluto, 1985 (1937), 227.
- 4 Michele Mitchell, "'The Black Man's Burden': African Americans, Imperialism, and Notions of Racial Manhood, 1890-1910," *International Review of Social History* 44, no. 7 (1999): 77-89; James H. Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 11-26.
- 5 For two overviews of the ways in which many black intellectuals privileged the explanatory power of economics over race during the Depression, see Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and especially Nikhil Pal Singh's analysis of the leftward turn within the black community in the changed circumstances of the 1930s in his *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 58-100. For an alternative view, see Jonathan Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land? World Affairs and the American Civil Rights Movement from the First World War to Vietnam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 75-128. While it is important to note that the black elite was a heterogeneous group that did not speak with one voice or pursue a uniform set of interests, there was a leadership class in the African American community identifiable to social commentators within and outside it. See Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Karen Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).
- 6 For the broad context of the significance of the interwar period and of Communist Parties to these processes to these processes, see Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2001), 113-157; Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 79-86; and Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 16-30.
- 7 William R. Scott, *The Sons of Sheba's Race: African-Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-1941* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993); Joseph E. Harris, *African-American Reactions to War in Ethiopia, 1936-1941* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994). While indispensable in charting African American responses

- to the crisis, these works say little about the role of the organized left. Robin Kelley and Cedric Robinson have offered the most insightful analyses of this relationship, but not in works focused on documenting the black/left intersection amid African American opposition to this Italian imperial endeavour. See Cedric J. Robinson, "The African Diaspora and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis," *Race and Class* 27, no. 2 (Autumn 1985): 51-65; Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 123-132.
- 8 Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 6.
 - 9 W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Atheneum, 1962 [1935]). The definitive account of Du Bois's biographical trajectory during these years can be found in David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 1-387.
 - 10 Martin Bernal, "European Images of Africa – Tale of Two Names: Ethiopia and N—," in *Images of Africa: Stereotypes and Realities*, ed. Daniel M. Mengara (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001), 24-25.
 - 11 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1994 [1978]), 56.
 - 12 Jack D. Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 16-17.
 - 13 Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 20.
 - 14 Gersham A. Nelson, "Rastafarians and Ethiopianism," in *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora*, eds. Sidney Lemelle and Robin D.G. Kelley (New York: Verso, 1994), 69.
 - 15 George M. Fredrickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 61-74.
 - 16 On popular traditions, see St. Clair Drake, *The Redemption of Africa and Black Religion* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1970), 11; Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 32-33; Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 26-27. On African Americans and Adwa, see Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 20; William R. Scott, *The Sons of Sheba's Race*, 21.
 - 17 George M. Fredrickson, *Black Liberation*, 74-80; Elliott P. Skinner, "Afro-Americans in Search of Africa: The Scholars' Dilemma," in Pearl T. Robinson and Elliot P. Skinner, eds., *Transformation and Resiliency in Africa: As Seen by Afro-American Scholars*, (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1983), 16-17; Dennis Hickey and Kenneth C. Wylie, *An Enchanting Darkness: The American Vision of Africa in the Twentieth Century* (East Lansing: Michigan University Press, 1993), 251-259.
 - 18 C. Peter Ripley, "Introduction to the American Series: Black Abolitionists in the United States, 1830-1865," in C. Peter Ripley, ed., *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 58; Robin D.G. Kelley, "But a Local Phase of a World Problem?: Black History's Global Vision, 1883-1950," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December 1999): 1045-1077.

- 19 David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 48; Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Noonday, 1995), 328.
- 20 Whitney and Tutt advertising quoted in Douglas Henry Daniels, *Lester Leaps In: The Life and Times of Lester "Pres" Young* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 67.
- 21 Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 153.
- 22 Alain Locke, "The New Negro," in *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1968 [1925]), 6.
- 23 Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (Toronto: Penguin, 1992), 32.
- 24 Houston A. Baker Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 12.
- 25 Imanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement: A History of Pan-Africanism in America, Europe, and Africa* (London: Methuen, 1974), 229-262.
- 26 W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Pan-African Congresses: The Story of A Growing Movement," in *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader*, 673.
- 27 George M. Fredrickson, *Black Liberation*, 152.
- 28 Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1998), 136, 193.
- 29 Colin Grant, *Negro With a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 155. Although a fuller discussion of the UNIA would take us too far from my argument, it is worth noting that the tensions within Garvey's and the UNIA's ideologies and program have led to quite contrasting historiographical accounts. In their important work of the 1970s and early 1980s, John Henrik Clarke, Tony Martin, and Lawrence Levine stressed the ways in which Garvey provided a timely and galvanizing articulation of a widespread black racial consciousness. Since then, Manning Marable and Judith Stein have underscored the social and economic conservatism of Garvey's nationalism (especially after his visa status was threatened due to attention from J. Edgar Hoover), while Barbara Bair, Robert Hill, LaVerne Gyant, and Ula Taylor have highlighted the contested conventionality of the UNIA's gendered hierarchies. For the purposes of the present discussion, these interpretations are all worth keeping in mind, though the central point I wish to keep in play is that UNIA nationalism put forward a transnational vision of racial pride that both held up an image of Ethiopia and enjoyed considerable appeal, and as such constitutes an essential part of the backdrop to the events of the 1930s. See John Henrik Clarke, ed., with the assistance of Amy Jacques Garvey, *Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa*, (New York: Vintage, 1974); Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Dover, MA: Majority Press, 1976); Lawrence W. Levine, "Marcus Garvey and the Politics of Revitalization," in John Hope Franklin and August Meier, eds., *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 105-138; Manning Marable, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), chapter 5; Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986); Barbara Bair, "True Women, Real Men: Gender, Ideology, and Social Roles in the Garvey Movement," in Dorothy O. Helly and Susan M. Reverby, eds., *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in*

- Women's History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 154-166; Robert A. Hill, "Making Noise: Marcus Garvey Dada, August 1922," in Deborah Willis, ed., *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography* (New York: The New Press, 1994), 181-205; Laverne Gyant, "Amy Jacques Garvey and Henrietta Vinton Davis of the Universal Negro Improvement Association," in James L. Conyers, Jr., ed., *Black American Intellectualism and Culture: A Social Study of African American Social and Political Thought*, (Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 1999), 25-35; Ula Yvette Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).
- 30 Manning Marable, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 117-120.
 - 31 Alberto Sbacchi, *Legacy of Bitterness: Ethiopia and Fascist Italy, 1935-1941* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1997), 5.
 - 32 Robin D.G. Kelley, "'AfriC's Sons with Banner Red': African-American Communists and the Politics of Culture, 1919-1934," in *Imagining Home*, 35-54; "Queen Mother" Audley Moore interview with Mark Naison, *Oral History of the American Left*, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Archives, New York University (hereafter Tamiment Library).
 - 33 See Beth Tompkins Bates, "A New Crowd Challenges the Agenda of the Old Guard in the NAACP, 1933-1941," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 2 (April 1997): 340-377. For two contrasting views of the CPUSA's level of internal discipline and democracy during the 1920s and 1930s, see Bryan D. Palmer, "Rethinking the Historiography of United States Communism," *American Communist History* 2, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 139-173; and Randi Storch, "'The Realities of the Situation': Revolutionary Discipline and Everyday Political Life in Chicago's Communist Party, 1928-1935," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 1, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 19-44.
 - 34 Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 255.
 - 35 For two statements that indicate the shared assumptions between Italian and British foreign ministries in the realm of diplomacy, compare Daniele Varè, "British Foreign Policy Through Italian Eyes," *International Affairs* 15 (January 1936): 81-102; and "Text of Hoare's Appeal for Peace," *New York Times*, 2 August 1935, p. 6.
 - 36 George Padmore, *Africa and World Peace* (London: Frank Cass, 1972 [1937]), 121. The Italian military was no pioneer in deploying this particular innovation of empire, as Rashid Khalidi points out: "Iraq, Morocco, Libya, and Syria were the laboratory where the military high-technology of the post-World War I era was first tried out, and where the textbook on the aerial bombardment of civilians was written." Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 27.
 - 37 On the broad sweep and pervasiveness of leftist antifascism in the 1930s and 1940s, see Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth-Century* (New York: Verso, 1997); Daniel Geary, "Carey McWilliams and Antifascism, 1934-1943," *Journal of American History* 90, no. 3 (December 2003): 912-934; and Alan Wald, *Trinity of Passion: The Literary Left and the Antifascist Crusade* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).
 - 38 "Effigy of Il Duce Burned," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 21 December 1935; "African Wrath – Cry 'Boycott Italy'," *Chicago Defender*, 21 December 1935.

- 39 Alberto Sbacchi, *Legacy of Bitterness*, 18.
- 40 S.K.B. Asante, *Pan-African Protest: West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1934-1941* (London: Longman, 1977), 172-208.
- 41 "Haitian Intellectuals Rap League of Nations," *Chicago Defender*, 17 August 1935; "2,000 Cubans Mass Aid to Ethiopia," *Chicago Defender*, 31 August 1935; "White and Black Demonstrate for Ethiopian Cause" (in Port of Spain, Trinidad), *Chicago Defender*, 31 August 1935; "West Indians Want to Fight," *Chicago Defender*, 26 October 1935; "J6/5/1, From Col Of, No. 71062/35, 31 December 1935," in Robert Hill, ed., *The Pan-African Movement, 1917-1957: A Documentary Record of Black Struggle, Part Three*, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library (hereinafter Schomburg Center); "J11/5/1, From Col Of, 71062/35, 30 December 1935," in *The Pan-African Movement*, Schomburg Center.
- 42 Kevin A. Yelvington, "The War in Ethiopia and Trinidad, 1935-1936," in Bridget Brereton and Kelvin A. Yelvington, eds., *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition: Essays on Postemancipation Social and Cultural History* (Miami: University Press of Florida, 1999), 189-225; Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially 58-109. For further transatlantic context, also see Laura Tabili, *"We Ask for British Justice": Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).
- 43 Ayele Bekerie, "African Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War," in Beverly Allen and Mary Russo, eds., *Revisioning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 122-123.
- 44 J. Ayodele Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa: A Study in Ideology and Social Classes* (Toronto: Clarendon Press, 1973), 326; Fred William Santiago-Valles, "Memories of the Future: Maroon Intellectuals from the Caribbean and the Sources of their Communication Strategies, 1925-1940" (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 1997), 361; Robin D.G. Kelley, "Introduction," C.L.R. James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1995), 10.
- 45 Ras Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism from Within* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 116.
- 46 For more on the organizing efforts in both London and Paris in context, see Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 241-305.
- 47 Charles A. Simmons, *The African American Press: With Special Reference to Four Newspapers, 1827-1965* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1998), 25-26.
- 48 James Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans*, 9-10; Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 8.
- 49 Cedric J. Robinson, "Fascism and the Intersections of Capitalism, Racism, and Historical Consciousness," *Humanities in Society* 6, no. 4 (Fall 1983), 325.
- 50 William R. Scott, "Malaku E. Bayen: Ethiopian Emissary to Black America, 1936-1941," *Ethiopia Observer* 15, no. 2 (1972), 132; Joseph E. Harris, *African-American Reactions*, 20-28; Red Ross, "Black Americans and Italo-Ethiopian Relief, 1935-1936," *Ethiopia Observer* 15, no. 2 (1972): 122-125; William R. Scott, *The Sons of Sheba's Race*, 10-114.
- 51 "Harlem Labor Centre," 18 December 1935, 2, Frank Crosswaith Papers, Box 3, Folder 6, Schomburg Center; "World Labor Called to Fight War," *Daily Worker*, 9

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- 52 Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young: Student Radicals and America's First Mass Student Movement, 1929-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), especially 136-137.
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